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Educational Transformation: Fort Riley University

Federico J. Rodríguez, Ph.D.

Dean

Fort Riley University, Fort Riley, Kansas

24th Infantry Division (Mech) & Fort Riley Kansas

Abstract

The growing consensus among educators and policy-makers is that the current process of education must change dramatically. A different approach is needed if we are to prepare today's leaders to meet tomorrow's challenges. The new structure should enhance preparation, allowing for innovation and futuristic thinking in a collaborative setting. Inherent and vital in the process, is the inclusion of trust in order for the empowerment process to be effective. This article examines an innovative approach that promotes synchronized, integrated educational opportunities for the military and civilian workforce at Fort Riley, Kansas. The article also outlines a bold new vision focused on leadership as a sharing process where current and future leaders are motivated and empowered for effective instructional leadership. It also describes an innovative collaborative mission committed to taking vision to implementation.

Educational Transformation: Fort Riley University

Americans, at all levels, have had great faith in the power of education to improve the quality of life. We look to education as an escape route from poverty, an antidote to intolerance born of ignorance, a primary source of national prosperity, and the foundation of democracy. Scientific and technological advances have intensified in the past decade, and for the first time in human history, created a truly global community. Modern telecommunications have linked all the corners of the planet as never before. Like the technology that helped create the emerging worldwide marketplace, the global community is in a dynamic period of change. Business communications, capital and financial services, research, and educational programs increasingly move across national borders. The pace of change will accelerate and the urgent need for highly educated men and women who possess competence, perspective, human values, and political courage will increase (New England Board of Higher Education, 1991).

It is clear that future leaders will need collaborative experience in order to better understand the arena that our future generation will enter as young adults and be prepared to assist them in that area. In his book Lexus and the Olive Tree, Thomas Friedman (1999) states, “Today’s era of globalization is a dynamic ongoing process: globalization involves the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper than ever before” (p.7).

The heightened interest and concern over educational reform to meet higher standards for student learning, improve curriculum and instruction, educate a more diverse student population and confront citizens who are losing confidence in public

instruction poses a difficult series of questions for educational institutions. Principal among these is: How do we best educate our next generation of leaders?

Educational Reform and the Preparation of Leaders.

Consensus among educators and the military supports the development of programs that train future leaders to work in collaborative and interdisciplinary settings. The National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policymaking, and Management (1999) defined an increasingly essential dimension of leadership -- the ability to communicate and collaborate with people inside and outside their organizations. The Institute indicates:

The 'top-down' model of a leader who makes decisions and charges others with carrying them out does not reflect the real distribution of power or the true source of motivation in today's organizations and communities. Leadership is a sharing process involving leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members. Today's leaders must be able to articulate a vision of where their educational system is going and a plan for getting there. Effective leaders spur change by taking risk themselves and by encouraging people to challenge their 'mental models' about how things work and what is feasible. (p. 6-7)

Empowerment: What's Trust Got to Do With It?

Empowerment is a concept, philosophy, set of organizational behavioral practices, and organizational programme. As a concept, empowerment is the vesting of decision-making or approval authority to employees where, traditionally, such authority was a managerial prerogative. Empowerment as a philosophy and set of behavioral practices means allowing the self-managing teams and individuals to

be in charge of their own career destinies, while meeting and exceeding company and personal goals through the shared company vision. Empowerment as an organizational programme involves providing the framework and giving permission to the total workforce in order to unleash, develop, and utilize their skills and knowledge to the fullest potential for the good of the organization as well as for themselves (Styhre, 2001).

Empowerment is a very comprehensive, dynamic process that has the potential to substantially impact an organization (Yates, 1999). Inherent and vital in the process, however, is the inclusion of trust and establishing collaborative partnerships with an interdisciplinary group of leaders in order for the empowerment process to be effective. The adoption of trust in a corporate culture is central to competition. Trust gives a corporation the ability to make meaningful partnerships inside and outside the corporation and becomes the basis for empowerment and quality. People will conduct business with people they trust, and a customer's trust in a company starts with a company's trust in its employees (Covey, 1999).

A counselor, educator-scholar at Fort Riley University, Fort Riley, Kansas further reinforces trust as a commitment for mutual dialogue. He writes:

Fulfilling vision is the accomplishment of a harmonious and congruent group. A group must be collaborating toward the common and clearly understood goal. If the administration or leadership is competing or at odds with each other it will not only confuse the focus it will bring tension to the those looking up to the administration for the mentoring relationships desired for this team.

It is also essential for the team to be able to access the understanding of the vision by asking questions. Clarifying their understanding gives them the security and solid ground to change the focus from self-preservation to the common goals of the team (Lacer, D., personal communication, March 5, 2004).

Another counselor, educator-scholar at FRU also emphasizes that trust is built by communication, hearing first-hand your mind and heart. It is this clear understanding that brings down the walls and where one can then aspire to a committed and unbeatable team (Carter, L., personal communication, March 5, 2004).

Hence, the major dimension to leadership is its ethical commitment (Foster, 1999). Ethical commitment implies that leaders will lead through responsible authority: not using their position or authority in a negative manner which involves the use of power to achieve those ends desired by the “leader”, what Foster (1999) labels a “negative power relationship.”

Chrislip and Larson (1994) propose frameworks for establishing ethical leadership for dealing with complex collaborative initiatives. They argue that in order to be a collaborative leader one must be able to: inspire commitment, be a peer problem solver, inspire hope and build broad based support through trust. Ketelle (2001) adds:

Building community can be viewed as an engagement that initiates a series of transformative events that encourage collaboration. Building networks of collective dialogue can help to create trust and cooperation because they reduce nonparticipation, uncertainty and they provide models for cooperation. (p. 1)

Transformation in the Army

Transformation and the need for change are also being echoed by the Army. The Army is increasing the degree in which it is going to have to synchronize and integrate (Williams, 2002, p.29). Top military leaders and strategists state that the way to do business in the future must include horizontally integrated organizations and that planning must include network connectivity. Hence, the Assistant Secretary of Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, stated that with education costing over 200 million dollars annually, he is recommending the elimination of all duplication in programs and services, consolidation of resources, and realignment of many education functions including libraries - general, technical, legal, medical, military occupational specialty, and special, in an effort to encourage innovative approaches to performing our business processes (CPOL, 2000). Congressman Duncan Hunter, Chairman of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee, further emphasized that military and civilian leaders are now challenged on how to take the Army to the future. Everything they do must be re-looked and re-done differently – to include training and education. The measure used to evaluate units and installations in the future is efficiency and effectiveness (Scott, 2004).

The Army has moved into a new century and we must also change aggressively, challenging the assumptions of the past and using technology to become more efficient and effective. The secretary believes that to fulfill its vision, the Army will exploit its competitive advantages: quality people, advanced technology, and a proven joint warfighting doctrine. The Army is capturing emerging technology to develop an unprecedented level of precision, speed, and battlefield awareness. As the Army grows more sophisticated, the demand for education will increase and lifelong learning will

become the norm for enlisted, officer, and civilian personnel alike. We, as educators, must embrace the knowledge, skills and abilities to create and manage the high technology learning/training environment.

What's Happening at Fort Riley University?

Today's Army is in a period of transition to better meet the challenges of the 21st century. As the Army transforms to the future force, other organizations must also define how they can best support these changes.

At Fort Riley, Kansas the command wanted a more dynamic and integrated educational system that provided quality comprehensive programs. The Fort Riley University (FRU) model was developed to support the need for synchronized, integrated educational opportunities for the military and civilian workforce – a workforce requiring high performance individuals with multiple and integrated skills. The transformation to a synergistic, integrated educational model provides Fort Riley the capability to adapt quickly and efficiently to an evolving Army mission. This transformation depicts FRU as a comprehensive approach which combines civilian and military educational and training programs. FRU also integrates museums and historical information to advance education, as well as the Army Career and Alumni Program to educate soldiers and family members to enhance their career transitions.

The Vision and Mission at FRU

At Fort Riley University forward-thinking is being promoted. Vision is not seeing things as they are, but as they will be. FRU's vision is to prepare visionary leaders and establish programs which focus on leadership as a sharing process involving all community members in a collaborative arrangement.

Vision Statement Inserted Here

FRU is committed to developing innovative, dynamic, and creative educational and training alternatives. The mission statement, as noted, further depicts the commitment of taking vision to implementation.

Mission Statement Inserted Here

FRU: An Integrated Organizational Structure

The FRU model depicts an organization in a forward-thinking collaborative arrangement where every entity is interconnected.

Organizational Model/Graphic Inserted Here

This model promotes the opportunity to respond to all education and training issues as a comprehensive university. The trainer, educator-scholar approach gives an image of training and academic excellence and enhances credibility of graduates. FRU concept allows for self-assessment and tracking the quality of the consortium of colleges, universities, and training programs. It enhances institutional vitality and positive recognition.

Student Services: The Student Services Division is a “go to” location for students seeking assistance. This Division provides counseling and testing, student outreach, and program promotion, with a focus to support students with every aspect of their education and training needs. The professional counseling staff, the heart of Student Services Division, provides a full range of educational counseling including all training and academic planning and preparation. The Student Services Division staff are dedicated, full-time educator-scholars committed to student advocacy. The FRU Testing program

supports a comprehensive variety of academic tests, professional competency, and certification testing as well as testing for on-line and distance learning.

The Student Services Division is concentrating its efforts on automation initiatives, including virtual counseling and on-line enrollments to better serve students. The virtual counseling initiative has stimulated the interest of students who may not have sought this service, and allows FRU to extend its outreach capability. The FRU concept has provided increased visibility to the community, allowing for the sharing of resources in Student Services as well as the other Divisions of FRU (K. L., Gatza, personal communication, March 10, 2004).

Academic Programs: Academic Programs provide on- and off-duty programs delivering educational opportunities for over 20,000 active duty, Department of the Army civilians and family members. The varied curriculum includes courses of study in Arts and Sciences, Administration, Business, Technology, Leadership, and Vocational Programs.

The FRU Consortium of Colleges and Universities provides the resources and flexibility to develop a more dynamic and integrated curriculum that can quickly be adapted to meet the changing needs of today's Army. This consortium of institutions of higher learning is at the forefront of transformation and provides educational leadership. Several revolutionary instructional delivery modes have recently been introduced at Fort Riley to address globalization and the changing needs of today's Army students. FRU offers high quality academic programs to enhance the military mission. By working collectively FRU is avoiding duplication in programs and services, and is promoting efficiency and effectiveness as proposed by military and congressional leaders.

Transformative learning implies becoming more reflective and critical, more open to accepting new ideas to meet the military mission (M.C., Moore, personal communication, March 10, 2004).

Military Programs: Fort Riley University also conducts military programs with high-tech resources that reach far beyond the post's boundaries. The university's futuristic concept of combining the total packages of education and training is exemplified by the development of its Military Training Division, consisting of four major individual training programs: the Military Off-Post Schooling Program for soldiers attending service schools in a TDY and return status, the On-Post Schools Program, the Noncommissioned Officer Education System Program, and the Digital Training Facility. The DTF, alone, allows FRU to transcend barriers of time and distance. The theme of training--"any time and any place", exemplifies the 24th Infantry Division (Mech) and Fort Riley's transformative and leadership initiatives as America's Warfighting Center.

The notion is to do more and do it faster and more efficiently with less. Therefore, the important improvements we make today with FRU will positively impact Fort Riley soldiers as well as the success of the next generation of military leaders. FRU has completed its high-tech Digital Training Facility which is vital in effectively supporting the changing mission of the Army and the civilian workforce. Advanced technological initiatives developed in conjunction with this high-tech facility will serve not only our soldiers at Fort Riley, but will also serve soldiers around the world.

Battlestaff and ISG Courses are instructed through Video Tele-Training, saving a significant amount of training dollars. FRU is spending more dollars on training, less on

travel. FRU will also be the first installation to use ATRRS to manage all installation training (J. G. Lucas, personal communication, March 10, 2004).

Museum: An important element in providing continuity to a changing Army has been its civilian workforce. Civilians have been a vital link in supporting the military mission during critical moments. At Fort Riley University, the museum's mission is to place the historical memory of the Nation, Army, soldier and family member at the forefront. During this critical time in U.S. history, the museum is fulfilling its obligation by sharing historical knowledge with soldiers, family members, DA civilians and the community through educational outreach, historical research and an oral history program. The museum is committed to linking history to the relevance of contemporary society and the cultural enrichment of our community.

The museum partnered with Kansas State University to celebrate Fort Riley's 150th anniversary. The symposium held in the fall of 2003 brought together military leaders, educators and scholars to focus on Fort Riley's contributions to the Army and American history. The museum provides educational outreach to the community through such initiatives as a Fort Riley curriculum guide and various educational trunks for students K-12. In addition, the museum's collections, research library, unit and community on-site exhibits promotes learning and awareness of military history. The museum is a valuable resource for leaders, students, scholars and the public interested in pursuit of historical knowledge. Hence, the museum is the cornerstone that promotes Army values and further encourages an ethical commitment to fully support the America's Warfighting Center at Fort Riley, Kansas and the civilian community at-large. (W. C. McKale, personal communication, March 10, 2004).

Army Career and Alumni Program: The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) provide programs to assist in positive career and educational transitions. ACAP is a team of competent, dedicated professionals focused on the individuals' needs. ACAP promotes an active process in the professional development of individuals by coaching, mentoring and investing the time for successful career transitions. Through the use of high-tech, state-of-the-art software and equipment and personalized assistance, ACAP teaches soldiers and family members the skills critical for successful transition as individuals. The process of ACAP also enlightens the soldier on military career opportunities supporting the Fort Riley reenlistment effort.

As a division of FRU, ACAP expands the knowledge and services provided to soldiers and family members. ACAP lays the foundation for life-long learning for successful re-careering as encouraged by the Assistant Secretary of Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. By working with other FRU divisions, soldiers have benefited from enhanced program visibility and a more comprehensive approach to career development and educational planning.

ACAP is promoting job fairs and workshops, teaching soldiers about opportunities available both in the military as well as the civilian sector. This program empowers the soldier to be more competent and confident, making more informed decisions about career options (D. M., Sodamann, personal communication, March 10, 2004).

How Does FRU Work?

At FRU, the major dimension to leadership is its ethical and collaborative commitment, exemplified by partnering with the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and

Fort Riley Command, directorates and other agencies on post. By building community, FRU has been able to initiate a series of transformative initiatives that encourage collaboration, trust and cooperation, promoting a bottom-up leadership approach.

The Dean's Quarterly Forum provides an opportunity for staff members to address critical issues and share their ideas on leadership through dialogue and mutual understanding. By working together, each individual is empowered and recognized. The forum creates discussion about who we are, what we are about, and where we are going—allowing us to sharpen our focus on instructional leadership.

FRU's success is a result of promoting a shared vision developed and owned by the team. By taking ownership, everyone begins to understand that commitment is what transforms a promise into reality.

FRU's platform for effective leadership encompasses three major components: (a) collaborative decision-making using democratic principles, (b) ethical leadership and (c) individual empowerment. FRU addresses critical educational issues through the use of seminars, forums, and conferences in which small interdisciplinary groups of professionals design paradigms in a free-flow exchange of ideas. By working in small groups where everyone contributes, each individual is empowered and recognized. The faculty and staff of the FRU Consortium of Colleges and Universities have the opportunity to collaborate with senior military officials, the garrison directorates, and other agencies from the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and Fort Riley, Kansas. The faculty and staff not only become better informed about other visions of leadership, they also have the opportunity to actually practice leadership.

Tracking FRU's Accomplishments!: What we are Proud of

The following achievements depict Fort Riley University's accomplishments and what we are proud of:

- University concept combining civilian and military educational opportunities, museum and ACAP
- High- Tech, State-of-the-Art digital programs
- Video Tele-Training
- Cost-effectiveness, cost avoidance saving dollars
- Partnerships-Community Building
- Consortium of colleges and universities
- Academic credit for all training
- Dean's Corner and publications shared world-wide via internet and leadership journals

The FRU concept combines all education and military training programs and utilizes high-tech digital programs to harness learning and knowledge—transcending time and distance. Moreover, the Fort Riley University concept has involved the entire Fort Riley community and has developed a dynamic consortium of colleges and universities allowing for innovation and forward-thinking. FRU embraces a bottom-up leadership approach empowering the civilian workforce. The Dean's Corner and other publications have been shared worldwide through the Internet and leadership journals.

Summary

Fort Riley University continues its transformation, combining all education and training under one umbrella. By developing a combined, comprehensive educational model that leverages all educational and training opportunities, FRU is promoting a win-win situation allowing for the professional development for all soldiers and family members. This developmental process will ensure a dynamic, integrated educational and training system to best support the Army's transformation into the 21st century.

FRU has undertaken a commitment to advance excellence in education and to empower forward-thinkers to make positive changes. Through FRU, students as well as staff members gain the qualities and skills desired for a strong foundation of leadership. As the pace of change accelerates, there is a significant need for the military and civilian workforce to demonstrate basic values, such as integrity, trust, and courage to fully support the warfighter. Therefore, FRU's major dimension to leadership—an ethical and collaborative commitment—is the basic tenet which guides FRU's transformation, now and in the future.

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